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# INTER-HIGH-SCHOOL ATHLETICS

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RECAP

## ADVISABILITY OF INTER-HIGH-SCHOOL CONTESTS IN ATHLETICS.\*

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This is a question of peculiar importance and significance. It has been a question of importance and significance throughout the entire history of the world. It has been one of the noticeable features of history that as a people have become civilized, in the sense of fine arts, literature and general culture, they have retrograded in physical manhood and prowess. It has been true of every people that have left their imprint on the pages of the world's history. Rome's Augustan age witnessed a citizen morally degraded and physically incapable. Her physical victories were won by mercenary soldiers, while the citizens, her erstwhile defenders, lolled at home in luxury and ease. Roman education at this time was one-sided and did not produce such many-sided men as Greek education did in its intellectual or Periclean age. Roman education during the Augustan age dealt excessively with fine art at the expense of fine physique, and a loss in fine physique necessarily caused a loss in moral character. This age produced a Vergil but not a Fabius, a Horace but not a Cincinnatus, a Cæsar but not a Regulus. Roman citizenship began to degrade when the Roman citizen was no longer required to be a threefold man, a moral and physical man as well as a skilled rhetorician. In discussing, then, a question that deals with the welfare of physical education in its relation to education as a whole, we must remember that it should be decided with the idea in mind of making the best possible citizens for our country in the future. If athletics, physical training and competitive contests assist in the making of a worthy citizen let them be fostered; if they hinder let them be eliminated.

In discussing this question I assume that it refers to all athletic competitive contests and not to any particular kind of an athletic competitive contest. That being true, we may at the first eliminate any objections that may be raised against any particular sport and discuss simply the advisability or the inadvisability of inter-high-school athletic contests. We may, then, fairly eliminate any popular disapproval of football or any other sport arising from the danger inherent in the sport itself and safely declare that we are discussing the practicability of inter-high-school athletic contests as a whole, and not the brutality or the non-brutality, the advisability or the inadvisability of any particular kind of a contest. We are discussing the whole and not any particular part. This method seems the only fair way of discussing such a question, as

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there is no one that cannot see that it would be the poorest kind of logic to condemn a whole policy of athletic contests simply because some of its integral parts may or may not be satisfactory.

With this brief introduction, showing that this is a question general in its nature, general in its application to all athletics, and therefore general in its treatment, we come to the subject in hand: Are inter-high-school athletic contests beneficial to the schools participating, are they detrimental to the educational interests of participating schools, are they destructive of good morals, do they foster a mental condition of "*non compos mentis*," a general restlessness in the pupil, or are they as a whole great aids in making the pupil, the prospective citizen, keener, more alert, purer, stronger in mind, body and soul?

Most firmly would I answer that they are beneficial, that they are not detrimental to the educational interests of a school, that they are not destructive of good morals and that they do assist wonderfully in causing the prospective citizen to be truly a three-fold man or woman.

Before entering into an enumeration of the manifold advantages of such contests, allow me to say that I am not defending any kind of an athletic system existing in any high school that causes and maintains athletics as the first and last subject in the curriculum. Speaking colloquially, I do not believe in athletics running the school, but I do believe in the school running or controlling the athletics. I do not believe that in any high school the athletics should be student controlled entirely. On the contrary, I think that they should be faculty controlled. By having such a faculty control the interest will suffer not one whit, while a good administration of athletic matters is generally assured. I do not believe, nor would I defend any competitive athletics that has for its motto, Sink or swim, survive or perish, victory or bust. Rather than have such a churlish, such a mercenary kind of athletics, I would say no athletics at all. Better none than bad ones. If athletics do not assist they hinder, if they hinder they should be eradicated. But if they do hinder, allow me to say that the blame should not be placed at the door of athletics as a system. "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's" and place the disapproval where it belongs. If they fail it is because they have not been controlled or administered properly and rightly. It is because there has been evidence of wanting tact, honesty or grit somewhere. It is not the evil inherent in the system of athletics itself.

Let us now enumerate some of the advantages of athletics and competitive contests. In the first place inter-high-school contests in athletics add to the interest in athletics. Good athletics cannot exist without such contests. The interest depreciates. Man by nature is adventurous. He likes to run risks. The chance or possibility of losing spurs him on to exert erstwhile dormant strength.



It is so with athletics. The very fact that the boy knows that he must match his strength and skill with the strength and skill of a foreign opponent causes him to strive harder, to practice more, to do better. It causes him to develop, to exert energies otherwise dormant, to think thoughts and act acts otherwise uncalled for because of the very lethargy of conditions.

Again, competitive contests in athletics with other schools will assist in stirring up a high school spirit, a spirit that, if well controlled—an enthusiastic spirit not a rampant one—cannot help but redound for the good of the school. It will be a spirit of fellowship, a spirit that will keep the eyes of the community on the school, that will keep the community informed of the grade failures and the resulting compulsory withdrawals from athletic participation. I had the opportunity and pleasure last year of visiting a town in West Central Nebraska where I thought the high school spirit was as near ideal as it possibly could be. Both the superintendent and principal were men of sterling integrity, admirable tact and unquestionable grit. This high school, one of the large high schools of the state, had boundless enthusiasm of the right kind. I saw this high school defeated when victory seemed theirs. Victory was snatched from them in the last moment. Yet no word of criticism against the judging parties. Not a word of complaint, only good humor and the dogged resolve to win next time. The same spirit was noticeable in the teachers. One need not ask who had made that high school spirit. I inquired about their athletic regulations and found that any student falling below a certain requirement, a remarkably high one, I might add, in either deportment or academic work was dropped summarily from all interscholastic contests either mental or physical. The very fact that this regulation was obeyed to the letter had caused a high school spirit and attitude whose value to the school was inestimable. When I went home to Sidney I told our high school of the remarkable spirit of this other school, expressing the desire that we might meet them in an athletic contest and the still greater desire that we might be able to model our spirit after theirs and in some degree, at least, reach such a high plane of physical training. We arranged in due time a boys' basket ball game with this school. When they arrived we found that their two best players had compulsorily remained at home because they were below the requirement in academic work. Because of their absence we won the game. Was there any soreness? Were there any regrets? None at all. The principal smiled and the boys grinned. It almost seemed to me that the idea of some anonymous writer had been drilled into their minds:

“If you think you’ve missed the mark

Use a smile.

If your life seems in the dark,

Why just smile.

Don't give up at any fight,  
There's a coming day that's bright,  
There's a dawn beyond the night,  
If you smile."

In this game their principal, with score nearly a tie, called three fouls on his own team in rapid succession. Not a boy winced. They knew that the fouls were made or that the principal, whom they trusted, in whom they had confidence, and whose honesty they respected, would not have called them. Let me ask you, Who had made that high school spirit? The boys? No. For a boy is a boy "for a' that and a' that," and in his high school years can be moulded and will be moulded much by circumstances and environment. Who had caused that high school spirit? Who had made it? The superintendent and principal of the school had caused it, had made it, with their honesty, with their integrity, their tact, their judgment, with their perseverance and their grit.

Another pleasing feature to notice about the athletics of this school was the respect and confidence shown by the pupils for the teachers. The experience of this school was that in so far as the teacher had interested himself in clean sports and things that the boys liked, in just that degree had the feeling between teacher and pupil been keener and better. I had occasion once last summer to stop in another town in Central Nebraska. While at the hotel I was talking with the proprietor's son, who was a student in the local high school. Knowing the principal of the school, without disclosing my acquaintance I asked in a casual manner how the boy liked him. He replied, "Oh, he's a gem outside of school, but he's a terror in school!" I asked for an explanation. The boy said that they had organized high school athletic teams and a high school band and that the principal took part, but that no one dared to "monkey" in school. This boy said that his grades were better than ever before because he wanted to take part in contests. He liked his teacher better than any previous teacher and "had never been so good in school in all his whole life." "He was afraid that he was getting to be an angel." Now it is apparent what athletic contests had accomplished in that school. They had raised the standard of discipline and academic work and had promoted a feeling of respect and fellowship between the teacher and the pupil.

I have read numerous criticisms and denunciations of our athletic methods in various educational journals. One of the chief complaints seems to have been that athletic contests created a rah, rah, rah spirit, a loose, yelly, giddy spirit, a winged spirit of victory always, a spirit destructive to good morals and sane living. We are told that this spirit leads to a so-called riotous good time on trips, smoking, pool halls, cards, etc. Again I submit that this rests with the powers that be. Simply because some

teacher whom you know, or of whom you have read, does not have grit or judgment enough to prevent such things, by no means proves that all athletic contests are wrong and impracticable. Instead of athletic contests increasing smoking, they prevent it. I point you to the Falls City High School, where athletics rightly conducted caused the pupils to boast in their high school paper that there was not a boy in the high school who used tobacco in any form. That this resulted from a system of competitive athletics, enlivened by numerous contests, I am quite confident. Regarding trips, I would say that the boys will do just what they are allowed to do. A boy will be just as inquisitive as he is allowed to be. He will take in just as much of the town as he is permitted to take in. Some one has well said that no team should visit another town without a competent instructor in charge, and that that instructor should be a member of the school faculty because he or she only can appreciate school conditions and school necessities. A boy or girl is an adventurous, an almost inquisitive personage; he will ride on the train platform, break the hotel beds, leave his initials on counters, steal towels for souvenirs, take in all the sights and amusements that the town offers, providing nothing is said to the contrary. Our teams will receive visitors as we allow them to be received. They will behave on trips as we allow them to behave. The honor of the school should always be the motto. If this is so, and it is continually emphasized and re-emphasized, the honor of the school will never mean the dishonor of the school. If that idea ever becomes thoroughly instilled into a school no one will be prouder of the honor of the school than the boys and girls.

Very often we hear that competitive athletics result in a deficiency in academic work, the remark being continually made that the athlete is brawn, not brain. Again would I submit that athletics must not run the school, but the school the athletics. Again would I submit that competitive athletics without an intellectual requirement must fail. Again would I urge that unless this study requirement, this academic requirement, is lived up to, that competitive athletics should be eliminated, as more injury than good must necessarily be done. If a grade requirement is made, respected and honored faithfully it cannot but in time mean better academic work. No doubt but when this grade requirement is first put into effect and rigidly enforced that the athletics for that year will fail, and may die. But let them fail, let them die, and the next year when it is clearly understood that business is meant, that the regulation will be enforced to the letter, there will be a resurrection and athletics can start anew on a good basis. With your permission I would like to use a rather personal illustration. We require at Sidney that all students who wish to take part in athletic contests and in practice for such contests must maintain

at least 70 per cent in studies and at least 70 per cent in deportment. During the year 1907-08 we had very few athletic contests, and during the year 1908-09 we had an exceedingly large number of athletic contests. Grades are issued to the students each month, and if they have failed to meet requirements they are ineligible for one month, or until the next grades are issued. They are given one month to make themselves eligible, during which time they cannot take part in athletics of any kind, not even in the practices. They understand that if they are below 70 they have no time for practice until they have raised the grades to required standing. The first Monday of each month a list of the ineligible for that month is read. As I stated above, in the year 1908-09 we had many contests in athletics and the previous year only a few. Now I would like to compare those years and show the effect of the contests on the academic work. During the first two months of the year without contests we had fifteen who were ineligible for athletic work on account of low grades in either deportment or academic work. During the year with contests eight were ineligible for the same causes during the same time. During the same time and for the same causes *this* year only one person has been ineligible. It has resulted in a remarkable increase in the character of the academic work. Again, I have taken for the same years, with the same conditions existing, the records of the six poorest boy students who were interested in athletics and have compared them. We find that boy No. 1 had during the year 1907-08 seven monthly gradings below 70, or in other words seven monthly failures in some subjects for the entire year. In the year 1908-09 the same boy had the same number of monthly failures, or seven. We had athletics the first year without contests, the second year with contests. The addition of competitive contests apparently made no change in the character of the work given us by boy No. 1. Take boy No. 2. The first year he had four monthly failures in some subjects; the year with contests he had none and was never ineligible. Boy No. 3 in 1907-08 had had eleven monthly grades below 70, and in 1908-09 only six, a decrease of 100%. Boy No. 4 had also a decrease of 100% for the same time and under the same conditions. Boy No. 5 had eighteen monthly grades below 70 for the year 1907-08 and only three monthly failures for the year 1908-09, a decrease of 600%. Boy No. 6's failures decreased from nine to one, a decrease of 800%. Or, by summarizing, we find that the six poorest students in our high school during the year 1907-08 had sixty monthly grades below 70%, and the same six boys for the following year had only twenty-one monthly grades below 70%, a decrease of thirty-nine grades below 70%, a decrease of thirty-nine monthly failures in subjects for the six poorest students, six students intensely interested in athletics. Please remember that these six boys are the



poorest in our entire high school, and this improvement is due entirely to the introduction of competitive athletics with a study requirement, as the records of these six boys for all previous years show no such radical improvement as does the record of 1908-09 over the record of 1907-08.

Now we know that idleness begets mischief and, as may be suspected, these six boys who all through their school life had worked but little, had caused much trouble. By the introduction of contests and the requirement of at least 70% in deportment we find the deportment of every boy much improved and discipline reduced to a minimum. By causing the six most indolent boys to desire to make a team and thus to get to work we found an unprecedented change in conduct. Boy No. 1's lowest monthly grade in deportment for the year without contests was 60%. His lowest for the year with contests was 96%, an increase of 36%. Boy No. 2's lowest grade for the year without contests was also 60%, and his lowest for the following year was 98%, an increase of 38%. These boys for the year without contests had sixteen monthly grades in deportment below 70%. The same boys for the year with contests to serve as an incentive for good conduct had only two monthly grades in deportment below 70%. These boys would have been ineligible sixteen times the first year as compared with two times for the year with contests. Every one of the boys found his yearly average much higher than ever before. Will you please pardon the pointedness of this illustration, but I believe that it tends to show that athletic contests can and will raise the grades in academic work and in deportment for all pupils just as they did in the case of the six poorest and most mischievous boys in a Western high school where the boys are truly alive all the time.

Again, I believe that the strongest argument that can be adduced in support of competitive athletics is that it is the consensus of opinion of the heads of the largest schools in the state of Nebraska that athletic contests have on the whole been of inestimable service and value to the school. Shortly before preparing this paper I sent out cards to the leading high schools in the state inquiring concerning the success of the athletics. I would like to have you note some of the answers. I sent these questions to about seventy-five schools, the seventy-five largest and best schools in the state. The first question was, Does your high school participate in inter-high-school athletic contests? The answers were that 95% of these schools did and that 5% did not. The second question was, What is the effect on the discipline of the school? Three per cent of the schools responded that the effect was to make the discipline of the school harder, 6% said that contests made no difference, while 91% said that athletic contests made the discipline easier, as it established a fellowship between the teacher and the pupil. The third question was, What



is the effect of athletic contests on the academic work? No schools responded that the effect of contests was injurious to academic work, 8% said that they could see no change either way, while 92% said that competitive contests assisted remarkably in raising the standard of the work. The fourth question was, Do athletic contests produce a good high school spirit? Three per cent of the schools responded that a spirit was produced that was not always good and that could not always be controlled, while 97% said that a good high school spirit was produced, one that was of inestimable value to the school. The last question that I submitted was, Have interscholastic contests in athletics brought about a better feeling between teachers and pupils? Five per cent of the schools responded that a better feeling was not produced, 5% said that there was no perceptible change in the relations between pupil and teacher, while 90% emphatically declared that a much better feeling and clearer understanding of each other was the result of such athletic relations. This to me seems the strongest possible argument that could be brought forth in support of athletic contests: the fact that from 90% to 97% of the leading high schools of the state of Nebraska had by actual experience found that competitive contests in athletics had produced a better feeling between teachers and pupils, had caused a good high school spirit, a spirit of service to the school and had been instrumental in securing a decided improvement in the character of academic work and in the standard of deportment.

Finally, I believe in athletic contests because they help to make men and women alert, vigorous and strong. Competition fits for life and competitive athletics is no exception to the rule. If a player knows that he must retain control of his temper or be taken from the game and disgraced, he obtains just that much training in self-control. If he knows that he must play fair if he would win approval and recognition, then he gains that much in integrity. If he knows that defeat is preferable to dishonesty and victory, then he learns not only honesty, but to bear defeat and misfortune. Athletic competitive contests rightly conducted bring out the idea of grit, determination, gameness and fairness so admirably portrayed by Edmund Vance Cook in his poem, "How Did You Die?"

"Did you tackle that trouble as it came your way  
With a resolute heart and cheerful,  
Or hide your face from the light of day  
With a craven soul and fearful?  
Oh, a trouble's a ton or a trouble's an ounce  
Or a trouble is just what you make it,  
For it isn't the fact that you're hurt that counts  
But only, how did you take it?"

"You're beaten to earth. Well, well, what's that,  
Come up with a smiling face,  
It's nothing against you to fall down flat,  
But to lie there, that's disgrace.  
Why, the harder you're thrown, the higher you'll bounce,  
Be proud of the blackened eye,  
For it isn't the fact that you are whipped that counts,  
But how did you fight and why.

"And though ye be done to death, what then,  
If you battled the best that you could?  
If you played your part in the world of men,  
Why the critics will call it good.  
Death comes with a crawl or comes with a pounce,  
And whether he's slow or spry,  
It isn't the fact that you are dead that counts,  
But only, how did you die?"

Athletic competitive contests, well regulated and rightly conducted, make men, strong men, men able to bear misfortune, men able to carry the ship of state on their shoulders. The duke of Wellington after the horrible battle of Waterloo said the battle of Waterloo was not won on the plain of Waterloo. Waterloo was won on the athletic fields of Eton, the athletic fields of Westminster, the athletic fields of Rugby. There the English boy learned grit, learned fairness and learned gameness. Well may we join with the Duke of Wellington in saying, "Hurrah for the athletic fields of Westminster, the athletic fields of Eton, the athletic fields of Rugby."

I do not deny that our athletic competitive system has many evil features, but I do deny that these features cannot be eradicated. I do deny that, because in a few instances ideals have been lowered, the system of competitive athletics should be abolished. I think that it would be a great fallacy to admit that, because a few instances or many instances of mismanaged athletics could be shown, the entire system of competitive athletics is a failure. What would you think if that kind of a policy and judgment should be followed in everything in life? Take an example. We read the story of the Christian Church since its inception and find that the Christian Church has stopped progress, has crowned ignorance, has bowed the knee to beastliness, and shed the blood of thousands of innocent persons by perpetrating unnecessary wars. We find the records of ministers and priests breaking their vows and turning into arch fiends. Do we then say that religion is a failure, that ministration and ministry is an evil? No, we see something good that is mismanaged and do not condemn the entire system because it failed at times or in specific instances. Again, we read in French history of the horrible revolution of 1790, a revolution carried on in the name of liberty. We read of countless murders, of unlimited dastardly deeds, all in the name of representative government. We read of anarchy, of mis-

government, of ruin, all in the name of freedom and equal rights. Do we then say that because attempts for liberty and efforts for representative government were mismanaged in this instance, that democracy and republican institutions should be abolished? We do not. Neither do I think because we can show limited or limitless instances of mismanaged athletic contests that we should say that the entire system is an evil, a curse, a failure, and should be abolished. It is, then, easy to see that the success of athletic contests rests with the teacher. It is in his or her power to make them symbolize dishonesty, cheating, avarice and cowardice, or to cause them to develop the traits of character of integrity, of honesty, perseverance, gameness, purity and grit, traits of character that will make better men, better women, better citizens, a greater, nobler and more useful commonwealth.



